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ABSTRACT

The relevance, the application, and the importance of linguistics to teaching English as a foreign language is discussed. The author's assumption is that linguistics is "irrelevant to the aims, and inapplicable to the tasks of such teaching," and agrees with linguists such as Rosenbaum that the goal of linguistic science is "to determine inductively the laws governing the behavior of observable data." Developments in linguistics during the past 100 years can be grouped into three main movements: (1) Neogrammarianism, which introduced rigorous requirements of an exact science into historical linguistics by concentrating on the observation of phonetic phenomena; (2) Structuralism, which forcefully promoted the anthropological view that all human languages are equal in complexity of structure, and was responsible for the widely accepted view that linguistics is a panacea for all problems in every type of language-teaching activity; and (3) Transformationalism, which has not yet contributed anything new to an understanding of natural languages but has put linguistics in some theoretical perspective and freed it from the excessive preoccupation of the structuralists with taxonomic procedure. Some time ago, language teaching was freed from philology; quite recently language teaching was freed from literary studies; it should now be freed from linguistics. (AMM)

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THREE LINGUISTIC MOVEMENTS:

NEOGRAMMARIANISM, STRUCTURALISM, TRANSFORMATIONALISM

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INTRODUCTION

The issue here is the relevance, the application, the importance of linguistics to teaching English as a foreign language. My assumption is that linguistics is irrelevant to the aims, and inapplicable to the tasks of such teaching. Admittedly this is a hard assumption to accept, because, during the past generation we have witnessed an intensive campaign for the introduction of theoretical linguistic tenets in the field of language teaching in general. Thus, over the years it has become the popular assumption that being "with it" in language teaching really means being hip on linguistics. Writing about secondary school English, Postman and Weingartner (1966, p. 26) make the following claims:

> Linguistics is here to stay. At an increasing (some say, a stampeding) pace, linguistics is influencing the teaching of English. To be modern, schools must claim to use "a linguistic approach" as well as the "new math,"...

This kind of bandwagonism can be easily dismissed, it is too obvious. But more subtle claims like that of Mackey (1967, p. 3)

> Language-teaching methods and the teaching of them depend ultimately on what the teacher or method maker thinks a language is

cannot be so easily dismissed. First, Mackey's claim is rather low-keyed and cannot generate too violent a reaction. Second, Mackey moves the issue one step further to the background by soft-selling linguistics as a deep rather than a surface requirement, thus playing on the teacher's insecurity in matters linguistic. For precisely these reasons, Mackey seems to me to be more effective than Postman and Weingartner in his promotion of linguistics.

LINGUISTICS

Linguistics means different things to different people. As we saw earlier, to some people it is a panacea for all problems in language teaching. For some linguists, such as Rosenbaum (1969, p. 470), with whom I happen to agree, the goal of linguistic science is

> to determine inductively the laws governing the behavior of observable linguistic data,...

Chomsky (1968, p. 1) puts the field in its proper perspective by referring to linguistics as

> ...the particular branch of cognitive psychology known as linguistics--...

Chomsky's view implies the reason for describing our formal grammars as <u>scientific metaphors of what happens in the brain when man is involved in linguistic activities</u>. It seems obvious that the old Platonistic view of language as the vehicle for the expression of thought is once again in the forefront of linguistic science.

However we may view linguistics, and however we may argue about what linguistics should do and should not do, we will really be talking in a vacuum until we get a fairly clear idea as to what linguistics has been doing up till now.

Developments in linguistics during the past hundred years can be grouped into three main movements: neogrammarianism, structuralism, and transformationalism. Let us now briefly examine the main tenets of these three movements.

NEOGRAMMARIANISM

I want to begin my examination of our three linguistic movements with neo-grammarianism, not just for historical reasons, but also because neogrammarianism is still part of our current linguistic technology. Robins (1968, p. 182) writes:

> Much of our linguistic theory, in particular our theory of historical linguistics, would not bear the form it bears today but for its direct dependence on the neogrammarians. In this sense they are part of the contemporary linguistic scene, and 'we are all neogrammarians now.'

The proper practice of neogrammarianism is historical and comparative linguistics. It appeared at a time when linguistic change was considered decay and when attempts were being made to explain the different sound changes in various languages on such grounds as the spiritual natures of the several nations. The neogrammarians came to reject such views; instead they postulated phonological laws that admitted no exceptions. The positions of the neogrammarians were first stated explicitly by two young German linguists, Osthoff and Brugmann (1878), who were nicknamed Junggrammatiker for their brashness rather than for their originality. Naturally, their views generated an adverse reaction on the part of those scholars representing the linguistic establishment of the time.

Under the influence of Darwinian theory, the neogrammarians introduced the rigorous requirements of an exact science into historical linguistics, by concentrating on the observation of phonetic phenomena and by abandoning the Humboldtian speculative conceptions. Linguistics then became a data-oriented science, and greatly advanced in phonetics and dialectology.

I do not want to spend much time on the only diachronic movement of the three linguistic movements discussed here. I will close by mentioning the monumental English grammars that several late neogrammarians have left us, such as Sweet, Jespersen, Kruisinga, Poutsma and Curme. As Lees said in a private conversation once, "No linguistic phonemena have we introduced in transformational grammar that were not examined exhaustively by the traditional grammarians."

Indeed neogrammarian grammars still remain our main sources of information about the structure of the English language.

STRUCTURALISM

Structuralism, our second linguistic movement, forcefully promoted the view, taken from anthropology, that all human languages are equal in complexity of structure and that there are no inferior and superior languages, although they may correspond to technologically more or less advanced cultures.

Structuralism always professed to be independent of any particular school of psychology. Hall (1964, p. 15) writes:

> Linguistics should be independent of any school of psychology or philosophy, and self-contained in its object of investigation (human language) and findings.

However, the father of American structuralism, Bloomfield, (1935, 1939) spent a great deal of effort and space to tie up structuralism with behaviorist psychology. At that time behaviorists were trying to replace subjective introspection about language with objective observation of its physical manifestations, and preferred to observe speech rather than to speculate about language. Herbert Feigl attacked this position by suggesting that Watson, the behaviorist, had made up his windpipe that he had no mind.

In accordance with the behaviorist rejection of mind, structuralists rejected meaning. Bloomfield (1939, p. 24) established meaning-free linguistics as follows:

> Once the phonemes are established, any form of the language is completely and rigidly definable (apart from its meaning) as a linear or quasi-linear sequence of phonemes. We do not possess a workable classification of everything in the universe, and, apart from language, we cannot even try anything of the sort; the forms of language, on the other hand, thanks to their phonemic structure, can be classified and ordered in all manner of ways and can be subjected to strict agreements of correspondence and operation. For this reason, linguistics classifies speech forms by form and not by meaning.

This rejection of what cannot be directly observed led structuralists to a grossly oversimplified view of what constitutes the proper province of linguistics and consequently to an oversimplified view of the complexity of the structure of natural languages. This is exemplified in the following quotation from Carroll (1954, p. 6):

> Professor Lounsbury of the Yale University Department of Anthropology made a trip to the Matto Grosso area of Brazil in the summer of 1950, carrying with him a wire recorder... His plan was to spend no more than two weeks on a particular language. The first week was to be spent in developing the phonemics and some of the morphology... The second week was to be spent wholly in obtaining lengthy continuous texts in the native language by means of wire recordings... Upon returning from South America in October 1950, Lounsbury reported to me that the experiment seemed to have been successful.

Trager and Smith (1951), les enfants terribles of American structuralism, published a 91-page lithographed book, An Outline of English Structure, in which 52 pages are given to the phonemics of English, 14 pages deal with English morphemics and derivation, 13 pages are on syntax, and 8 pages explain why the authors included nothing on meaning.

The structuralists developed highly exact methods of collecting, examining, and classifying linguistic data, but they were misled to believe that their methods of structuralizing constituted linguistic

theory. Pike (1947, pp. 57, 58) writes:

> It is assumed in this volume that phonemes exist as structural entities or relationships; and that our analytical purpose is to find and symbolize them.

To the misconception that the discovery of structural units constitutes linguistic theory, Lees (1957, p. 380) reacted as follows:

> The linguistic units postulated by a grammar are constructed much like the concepts of proton, convalent bond, or gene; they are postulated because of the great predictive power which they lend to the theory, but they are not brought to light in the data by a process of induction.

In addition, Lees (1957, p. 379) writes:

> Not even the most advanced of the physical sciences, not to mention the whole remaining less exact body of scientific knowledge, is so powerful as to provide a discovery procedure for its area of interest. There is no known mechanical procedure in all of advanced theoretical physics which will permit an expert physicist to find the laws of nature which connect the readings on the meters of his laboratory one with another or each with the phenomena outside of the laboratory.

Lees's attack was more than timely. Structuralists have always been terribly uptight about the hierarchy of units in their static system of language description. Different "emes" and "allo's" just sat around in an "Item and Arrangement" (Hockett (1957)) old age home, where the mere mixing of levels from phonemic floor to morphemic floor to syntactic floor (Trager and Smith (1951)) was a capital sin. The lunacy of this model resulted, of course, from the banishment of meaning in the model.

The structuralists are given credit primarily for the notion of "contrast" in linguistic structures. However, this notion has been shown to work "almost" in phonology, "rarely" in morphology and "never" in syntax and beyond. Furthermore, the notion of contrast is not only useless, but also misleading in foreign language teaching.

The most powerful tool of linguistic description that structuralism developed has been the notion of the distinctive feature (Jakobson,

(1952). Linguists had been working with segments, in both phonology and syntax, for centuries. For the first time it was shown that we could add a new dimension to our unidimensional segments by postulating that bundles of distinctive features underly segments. This impressively important contribution of structuralism was never bought by most die-hard structuralists. It was the transformationalists who seized on it and later extended its use to the description of "parts of speech."

The structuralist era produced an incredible number of popularizers who have been hard-selling linguistics to language teachers for over a generation. This generation of scholars is really responsible for the widely accepted view that linguistics is a panacea for all problems in every type of language-teaching activity.

TRANSFORMATIONALISM

Being a transformationalist, I have vested interests in this school of linguistics. However, the only thing I can say about transformationalism is that it has not yet contributed anything new to our understanding of natural languages.

Transformationalism has done three things: (a) it has put linguistics in some theoretical perspective and freed it from the excessive preoccupation of the structuralists with taxonomic procedures (see Bach (1964), Chomsky (1957, 1965c), Postal (1964)); (b) it has borrowed from mathematics the notion of the formal (i.e., mathematicized) model and has been applying it in linguistic description (see Chomsky (1955, 1962, 1963, 1965a, 1965b), also Chomsky and Miller (1963), also Chomsky and Schutzenberger (1963), for references); (c) it has

revived traditional philosophical notions of creativeness in language and intuition about grammar, as Chomsky (1966) showed in his Cartesian Linguistics, where he tied transformational grammar with Humboldt and the rationalist philosophical movement. However, there is not a single claim in transformational theory that is not contested by some of the transformationalists themselves. The formal and substantive universals used in the construction of our formal grammars are contested. Postal in his "Anarchy Notes" finds the model both too powerful and too weak. Lexicalists and transformationalists dispute the position of the semantic component in the model. Disagreements are rife as to the representation of deep structures. We do not even have any substantive semantic universals by means of which semantic strings could be represented. We have not arrived at any generally acceptable algorithms for the representation of semantic relationships.

Despite this state of flux and instability in transformational theory, popularizers have made great efforts to incorporate transformational grammar into language-teaching methodology and into textbooks. Gunter (1965) is the first one who introduced "transformations" in grammar drills. Saporta (1966) uses transformational theory to attack language teaching based on structuralist views and implies that transformational theory has the answers. Roberts applies transformational grammar to high school syntax (1964), to teaching English as a foreign language (1963), to teaching language skills to American students in secondary schools (1967a) and in college (1967b).

Chomsky has repeatedly denied that there is any meaningful, direct relationship between transformationalism and language teaching. Chomsky (1970) writes:

> I am, frankly, rather skeptical about the significance, for the teaching of languages, of such insights and understanding

> as have been attained in linguistics and psychology....
> .....
> ...it is difficult to believe that either linguistics or psychology has achieved a level of theoretical understanding that might enable it to support a 'technology' of language teaching.....
> .....it seems to me that there has been a significant decline, over the past ten or fifteen years, in the degree of confidence in the scope and security of foundations in both psychology and linguistics. I personally feel that this decline in confidence is both healthy and realistic. But it should serve as a warning to teachers that suggestions from the 'fundamental disciplines' must be viewed with caution and skepticism.

Needless to say, Chomsky's warning against a premature rushing to apply the new fashion has gone completely unheeded, and the work of the popularizers is continued, to the great despair of language teachers.

TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

The linguist uses natural languages as sources of information which help him make generalizations about linguistic universals and about man's linguistic competence. Over the years linguists have understood few of the phenomena related to natural languages and have been able to give formal explanations to even fewer phenomena. Finally, it should be emphasized that these explanations are furiously disputed among linguists from opposing camps or sub-camps. We do not have to go to exotic languages and obscure phenomena for such contested issues. The best example is the difference in meaning between active and passive; this is not a settled issue among linguists and it will apparently not be settled in the foreseeable future. Linguists always get bogged down with the format of their tools of linguistic description and "minor" details fall by the wayside.

If the teacher of English as a foreign language were to limit his teaching to those parts of English structure that linguists understand, it would be as if people had not poured water while physics was waiting for Newton to explain the law of gravity. Obviously the teacher cannot wait. He is interested in getting his students exposed to English so that they can internalize its rules and become good users of it, all of it, including the parts that linguists do not understand.

It is the proper concern of the linguist whether [h] and [ŋ] are in complementary distribution and whether generalized transformations should be in a formal grammar. These issues obviously do not concern the teacher of English as a foreign language, because however they may be answered they will make no difference in the teacher's job. He works with the surface structure of English, and he is concerned with those aspects of his students' language which interfere with English. He wants to help his students use the passive correctly, understand the difference between "essential to" and "essential for" and distinguish between "made of" and "made from." These are linguistic phenomena which are the proper concern of the teacher and about which linguists have yet to say anything.

The foreign student of English goes through the agony of learning the difference between "shadow" and "shade," between "since" and "from," between "high" and "tall." He also suffers until he learns how to say "guilty of" instead of "guilty for," "better than" instead of "better from," and "English is" instead of "English are." These are real problems for the student and the teacher of English as a foreign language. Such phenomena, however, rarely excite the linguist because there is no place for them in his theories about natural language. A

language teaching too closely tied to some linguistic theory is bound to ignore such problems.

CONCLUSION

We began with the assumption that linguistics has nothing to do with the teaching of English as a foreign language. It seems to me that the evidence we have seen substantiates this assumption. However, I expect that many objections will be raised to my conclusion, the most obvious being: "But look, both linguistics and language teaching are dealing with the same subject matter." I will agree that the subject matter is the same, but only in the sense that the theory of arithmetic and the procedure of balancing one's checkbook are ultimately related to the same subject matter. Beyond this deep, common point of departure lie the vastly different areas of the two disciplines.

It seems to me that we have to recognize the independence of foreign language teaching; we have to encourage it, support it and nurse it. It was some time ago that language teaching was freed from philology. Quite recently language teaching was freed from literary studies. Let us all now put our shoulders to the wheel and free language teaching from linguistics.

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